

To Be Human

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Summary: An extension to the regular Halo 4 ending. After Chief is left to his thoughts by Lasky, a blue spartan comes to speak to him about his idea of what it means to be human, and how Cortana will never be truly gone. Includes mentioning of a character from the Halo: Evolutions comics and sets up a possible Spartan Ops story I may start. Appropriate for all audiences.

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John continued to stare out the window onboard the Infinity. It had been an hour since he destroyed the Didact's ship. It had been an hour since he saved humanity from certain destruction again.

It had been an hour since Cortana sacrificed herself to save him.

"Mind if I join you?"

John brought his head up from his thoughts as he heard the voice of Captain Lasky speak behind him. The captain had once been a cadet he had rescued from Corbulo military academy during the start of the war. It was far back in the past, but it was one of the many moments of his career he remembered.

He turned to face Lasky. "Of course not, Sir."

"At ease, Chief." Lasky replied, walking up to stand beside him. "It feels kind of odd for you to call me 'Sir.'" He joined Chief at his side and they both looked back at the Earth. "Beautiful, isn't she? I don't get to see her often enough." He looked at Chief, who remained quiet, and continued. "I grew up on New Harmony. Attended Corbulo Military Academy. Never saw Earth in person until I was an adult, but... I still think of her as home."

A small period of silence set in, and Lasky looked at Chief. Was he still lost in thought over what happened? "You don't talk much, do you?" Lasky asked, hoping to break the tension. When Chief didn't respond, Lasky decided to speak again, hoping to break through his shell. "Chief, I won't pretend to know how you feel. I've lost people I care about, but... never anything like you're going through."

"Our duty as soldiers is to protect humanity." John finally spoke. "Whatever the cost."

Lasky turned to face Chief, analyzing how he had said those words. "You say that like soldiers and humanity are two different things. Soldiers aren't machines." That one phrase seemed to set the Master Chief off, as he turned to face Lasky for a second. "We're just people." As he finished, he noticed him turning his head back, likely lost in thought over the things Lasky stated. "I'll let you have the deck to yourself."

John watched as Lasky walked away, turning back to face the Earth again. When he was gone, John found himself speaking out loud. "She said that to me, once. About being a machine."

As he finished that last sentence, he heard heavy footsteps somewhere behind him.

After an hour of searching, Zach had found him.

Zach was a SPARTAN-IV that had been onboard the Infinity during their touchdown on Requiem. Before his training to be a Spartan, he had fought the Covenant forces on Reach, New Mombassa, and the Ark, being awarded his rank of Lieutenant Commander for acts of heroism and bravery. He was bred to be a soldier to the bone, but right now he wasn't going to be speaking to the Chief as a soldier. Right now, he just wanted to be a helping hand.

"You're a hard man to find." Zach began. "Probably easier to find in a crowd rather than a huge ship." He lined himself up next to him. Zach had always imagined what the Master Chief was like. He never ran into him during the battles he fought, but he had heard the stories like everyone else. He also caught wind of how he had lost his A.I. partner, Cortana. That was the reason he had went to find him.

"Beautiful. Earth is like a second home to me, after I fought to try to protect Reach. My brother took up a rifle to defend our home, but we both saw our parents die in New Alexandria as a transport was shot down. His reaction was very vocal, but I stayed static for a while. That same night, he took shrapnel to his arm from a needler, but he kept a strong grip on some energy sword he wanted to keep. Now he's a cyborg and a Spartan; one of the most intelligent members of the group."

Zach stopped for a moment and looked at the Master Chief. His Mark VI armor was different from his Recon armor. The green was fading and the armor was scarred from some of his battles; not like the blue and gold colors that aligned Zach's suit, which was still in good condition after his repairs from his adventure on Installation-06 four months ago.

"I'm not saying I know how you feel about losing your friend, but my brother knows what you're going through. It might have been more personal for him, though. He created an A.I. using tech he had recovered from Reach, New Mombassa, and even the Ark. He called it-" He paused as he noticed the Master Chief seem to tense. "He called him Larry. He was his friend and they looked out for each other, as well. But Larry gave his life to save my brother around the same time I had led a team on Installation-06. I never got the details, but my brother was devastated. He's one of those guys who speaks his mind, even if it means disobeying an order."

John only looked at the other Spartan for a moment before turning back to face out the window. With that, Zach continued.

"My brother and I; we haven't seen eye to eye on a lot of things. He says I'm too much like a soldier; that I follow our father's example too much. He retired from the corps after the loss of Arcadia, but he had served at the battle of Harvest. I grew up listening to his war stories, and I even joined the ODSTs after training. Now that he and mom are gone, I try to live by their examples to carry on their memory. A lot of people say I'm a soldier to the bone almost like my father, but I do feel. I cried a lot after we escaped Reach; for my parents, for my brother and how I failed to keep him safe from harm, for all of those we left behind, and for how I had almost just lost hope in the face of certain destruction. But something my mother had taught me was that even if someone's dead, they're never truly gone. They live on in our memories through stories and actions; through even the little things like promises kept. Hell, when my brother carried me out of New Mombassa with the help of Lieutenant Parisa and her company, she talked of how she kept the promise from some dead friend of hers that she would marry him."

John turned straight towards the mysterious blue Spartan that had been speaking to him. Parisa? He remembered her, and that day so long ago that he had made that promise. They had ran into each other during the battle of New Mombassa. She had been holding the picture and he was about to remind her not to bring personal items into combat, but then he recognized the picture. He had wanted to tell her then about how he was alive, but he kept quiet so that ONI security wouldn't have a breach.

"What happened to her?" John decided to ask.

Zach turned towards Chief, surprised that the Master Chief had even talked at all. "We met up again after the Battle of the Ark. She had survived and eventually visited the monument to the fallen on Earth. Someone had carved your number into it and taped a medal next to it. We didn't know if you were alive back then. After that, I was one of many candidates chosen for the SPARTAN-IV program, and if I remember correctly, Parisa had been invited to join as well. I don't think she's onboard the Infinity right now, though."

John once again looked back out the window.

"Does than name mean anything to you?"

"I knew her. Once."

Zach figured there might have been a secret purpose behind those words, but he chose to ignore it for now. "I guess the point I'm

trying to make is that as long as you live with her in your memory, she's never truly gone. Just like my parents aren't really gone because I live by their example. My father was a military man to the bone, but my mother was a civilian who knew what it was like to be human. She had so many flaws and it was questionable why they ever got married, but I guess I know why now. Even a soldier needs to know what it feels like to be human."

John lowered his head and clenched his fists, remembering so many painful memories at once.

Zach noticed this sudden change in the Chief's behavior. "I know what that feels like; to question everything you know. Not a day goes by where I don't say to myself 'I want to be more human.' But the real difference that I see between a soldier that seems more like a machine and a soldier that seems more like a human is the emotions they give off. Perhaps you need to think on that kind of thing for a while. It might help." Zach decided it was time to stop his speech and walk away, but the Chief's voice stopped him again.

"What's your name, Spartan?" The question sounded much less like an order and more like a request.

Zach turned to face John. "My name's Zach. I was the 107th candidate for the SPARTAN-IV project, and I will be leading Fire Team Crimson when we return to Requiem to continue studying the Forerunners."

John nodded. "Thank you, Zach. You've given me much to think about."

"You're welcome. It was an honor to have spoken to you. You're a legend to the rest of us Spartans. And legends never truly die."

"Just like those we care about."

"Exactly. Try to have a good rest, Chief. Even the heavens know you've earned it." Zach walked away to his own chambers, leaving John to his thoughts a while longer.

"Remembering those I care about..." He silently spoke. "That's what it means to be human."

AUTHOR'S NOTE: So there you have it. A special one-shot I've had in my mind for a long time after seeing the end of Halo 4. It's set in a canon version of the universe, although my Spartan and my brother's is only canon to our stories. He is currently writing a story on his Spartan's past, and this only reveals a tiny bit about it, since even I don't know all of his plans. The mentioning of Lt. Parisa from Halo: Evolutions was also an idea of mine of a way 343 Industries could give Chief more character development. We'll just have to see what they decide to do.

I also might start a story on the Spartan Ops campaign (maybe even a machinima on it) but there are some things I need to sort out beforehand. Reviews are welcome from anybody for this one-shot. Just remember: KEEP IT CLEAN. ;-)

End
file.